



QUICK GUIDE | CATERERS

On-premise retailers licensed as caterers may provide prepared food and beverages to customers hosting an event at an off-site location. The purpose of the license is to allow customers to host private events (e.g., weddings) so long as alcohol service is incidental to the service of food. In addition to complying with the rules governing the operation of other on-premise retailers, caterers must also operate in accordance with the following:

FOOD REQUIREMENT

A licensed caterer must serve food prepared by the caterer at all catered events. It is a violation to solely provide alcoholic beverages for an event and no food. Furthermore, the mere service of snack items such as potato chips, popcorn, pretzels, nuts, cookies, and candy are not sufficient to satisfy the food requirement.

LOCATION AND STORAGE REQUIREMENT

A caterer must own, rent, or have access to a kitchen licensed by the District of Columbia Department of Health (DOH) or other state health agency. While the Alcoholic Beverage Regulation Administration (ABRA) will license caterers located in other states, caterers are required to store alcohol used for District events in the District of Columbia.

PURCHASING ALCOHOL

A caterer may purchase alcohol for an event from a licensed Wholesaler or licensed Off-Premise Retailer's Class A and AI (Internet Retailer) stores. Nevertheless, for events where there will be 100 or more guests, a caterer may only purchase alcohol from an Off-Premise Retailer's Class or AI license. This requirement does not apply to caterers that hold another type of on-premise retailer license (e.g., restaurant).

EVENTS AT SITES WITH LICENSE APPLICATIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION

An applicant that has submitted an application for a license may permit a licensed caterer to host an event at the location submitted on the application. In this case, the caterer shall retain responsibility for the event, including control over the modes of ingress and egress, bar and security staff, and the service of alcoholic beverages. Caterers must also ensure that sufficient food is available as required by law. Finally, caterers may not share any profits from the sale of alcohol with the applicant or anyone else who does not hold the caterer's license. Nevertheless, applicants for licensure and third parties may retain any admission fees charged for a catered event.

UNUSED ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

Patrons may remove alcohol from the event site so long as the bottle is closed. Customers who purchase or receive alcoholic beverages at the event site shall be permitted to remove sealed containers of alcoholic beverages from the premises and retain possession of unsealed containers on the premises. With the agreement of the wholesaler or retailer, a caterer may return any unused alcoholic beverages to the seller or store the alcohol in the District of Columbia at the caterer's licensed premises or approved off-site storage location.

EVENT REQUIREMENTS

All catered events must have the license holder or a licensed manager present during the hours that alcohol is sold, served, or consumed at the event. Furthermore, the owner or manager shall post a copy of their license in a place clearly visible to the public for the duration of the event.

MANDATORY REPORTING

Caterers are required to submit semi-annual reports to ABRA that report food, non-alcoholic beverages, and alcoholic beverage sales and expenditures. The due dates for submission of the form are July 30 and January 30 each year. [See ABRA's website for a copy of the form.](#)

CONTACT ABRA

For more information, visit ABRA.DC.Gov, call (202) 442-4423, or email ABRA@DC.Gov.